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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000563

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

FOR AF/S

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND MCC ISSUES.

SUMMARY

[11.](#) (SBU) Ambassador took advantage of October 18 and 25th meetings with the Minister of Local Government (then Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs) to raise not only multilateral issues but to seek her thinking on the consultative process essential to the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) process in Lesotho. Minister Sekatle in her role as the Minister of Local Government has the responsibility to maintain constant communication with the 128 community councils in 10 districts that comprise Lesotho. In that regard, the Ambassador and the U.S. Mission have provided substantial support through training and decentralization workshops prior to the 2005 local government elections. Using these elections as a starting point, she re-emphasized the importance of decentralization and consistent communication with constituency as the government of Lesotho continues to carry out the proposal development stage of the Millennium Challenge process. The Minister also raised the need for land reform and accurate registries to develop housing mortgage sector. MCC's Country Representative Deidra Fair participated in the October 25 meeting. End Summary.

ELECTORAL SUPPORT

[12.](#) (SBU) Minister Sekatle expressed her deep thanks to the U.S. for its strong support before, during and after Lesotho's first local government elections since independence. She said that the leadership role of the U.S. within the donor community had been an essential element in Lesotho's formal and peaceful local elections which resulted in over 50 percent of the seats being captured by women candidates. She elaborated that without this type of international assistance, it would be difficult for Lesotho with its limited outreach and communication network to carry off such democratic processes in a comprehensive manner. Dr. Sekatle alluded to her country-wide travels as well as those of U.S. consultants in the electoral process. The Ambassador responded that democracy building and support for gender equity are key elements of our foreign policy and strongly apply to countries like Lesotho who are in the process of further institutionalizing democracy. She further indicated that with the 2007 national elections approaching, the U.S. would seek to provide continued support to Lesotho in the arena of democracy.

CONSTITUENCY OUTREACH

[13.](#) (SBU) In that regard, the Ambassador reminded Minister Sekatle that consultations with the involvement of local communities remained essential, not only during electoral seasons, but should be a permanent hallmark of government decision-making particularly in the area of eliminating poverty and impaired quality of life in areas of water, housing and education. The Minister stated she has been soliciting feedback from constituents in local government for nearly a year. This was particularly applicable within the context of Lesotho's eligibility for the MCA. The Minister said that she felt a deep responsibility herself to do so, but was concerned that her Ministry had not been as integrated into the MCA sub-cabinet meetings as it should have been. The Ambassador encouraged the Minister to make her opinions known and, since she was acting as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, she would be chairing the next sub-cabinet meeting on the Millennium Challenge Account proposal of Lesotho.

MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE ACCOUNT

[14.](#) (SBU) In a follow-up meeting on October 25, the Ambassador reiterated the necessity for the collaborative process, and Minister Sekatle responded that she felt she had made substantial progress with the sub-cabinet group. (Note: Ambassador invited MCC Country Representative Deidra Fair to sit in on the Ambassador's discussion with the Minister. End Note) Dr. Sekatle felt that she had been empowered to make her interest known to the Cabinet as a whole and that she was fully committed to carrying on with the decentralization and communication process. Minister Sekatle was also reminded of the necessity for coordination between her Ministry and the Ministry of Finance, which has the lead on the Millennium Challenge process. The Minister then invited her Principal

Secretary Mrs. Matabane to join the meeting. During the

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remainder of the discussion, Ambassador also asked that the Minister try to work out with her team and Ministry of Finance team a concrete schedule aimed at surveying the 128 constituencies to continue the consultative process that she had been very much engaged in during the past year concerning their specific needs as outlined by the Basotho, i.e. economic development, eliminating poverty, developing housing and

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democracy building. The Minister reiterated her support for this process and enthusiastically raised the issue of land reform and development of a functioning registry of property throughout the country. We re-emphasized the importance of the Land Reform Act in Parliament; the Minister stated, as had the Minister of Finance in numerous conversations in concert with the Minister of Trade (reftel), it is in their best interest to see that this law would in Parliament. (Note: Finance Minister Thahane reiterated October 31 his intent to present the legislation during the current Parliamentary session. End Note.)

15. (SBU) Firm agreement was reached on meetings to be held between the working groups of the Minister of Local Government and Finance at the appropriate levels with feedback and further information from the U.S. Ambassador as needed and requested.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) We believe that some of the internal tensions that have existed between the Ministries of Local Government and Finance -- both crucial to addressing the issue of poverty elimination -- have been substantially alleviated. On October 26, the Ambassador spoke with the Minister of Finance and informed him that poverty elimination and consultancy had been raised with his colleague, the Minister of Local Government. We believe that there is now a clearer understanding of U.S. goals and objectives and we hoped that this would translate into collaborative work on the part of Lesotho's varied ministries to achieve those objectives. Finance Minister Thahane responded that he was indeed aware that we had consulted with relevant ministries, was grateful for the intercession, believed our intervention had been positive, and would assist the Cabinet Subcommittee in advancing its teamwork on the issues of poverty reduction, land/housing reform, gender equity, and the consultancy process.

17. (SBU) On October 28, in a follow up discussion with MFA Moleleki, he also noted the positive role played by U.S. representatives in keeping various elements of the GOL apprised of U.S. policy direction and stated that the GOL's internal coordination benefited from a deeper understanding of our overall goals and objectives which MFA characterized as consistent with Lesotho's own national vision for the next 10 years. (This message was cleared by MCC Country Director Deidra Fair.) End Comment

PERRY